a)   receiving from a respective signal source signals which include a control field, which control field takes one of a plurality of possible values, and the subsequent handling of the said signal by the network being controlled according to the value of the control field;

b)   within a lower level of a messaging protocol, and prior to the processing of the signal by higher level functions, overwriting the control field with a value from a restricted subset of the plurality of possible values; and

c)   subsequently processing the signal in the network in dependence upon the said value from the restricted subset of the plurality of possible values.

2.   (*Twice Amended*)   A method of operating a communications network comprising:

a)   communicating control signals between nodes of the network via respectively corresponding links which control signals conform to a predetermined signalling protocol;

b)   at one of the said nodes, receiving from a signal source external to the network signals conforming to the said predetermined protocol and including a control field, which control field takes one of a plurality of possible values;

c)   within said lower level of a messaging protocol running on the node, and prior to the processing of the signal by higher level functions running on the node

overwriting the control field with a value from a restricted subset of the plurality of

possible values; and

d)   subsequently processing the signal in the network in dependence upon the

said value from the restricted subset of the plurality of possible values.

8.   (*Twice Amended*) A node suitable for connection in a communications

network and comprising:

a)   a network interface for connection to the communications network;

b)   a signal interface for connection to a signal source external to the

communications network via respectively corresponding links;

c)   means connected to the signal interface for overwriting, within a lower

level of a messaging protocol, a control field in a signal received via the signal interface

from the signal source with one of a subset of predetermined values; and

d)   signal processing means for processing the said signal in dependence upon

the said one of a subset of predetermined values.

13.   (*Twice Amended*) A method of operating a node in a communications

network, which node is in use connected to a signal source external to the

communications network via respectively corresponding links, the method comprising:

a)   receiving from the said signal source signals which include a control field,

which control field takes one of a plurality of possible values, and the subsequent

handling of the said signal by the network being controlled according to the value of the control field;

b)   overwriting the control field at a low level process with a value from a restricted subset of the plurality of possible values; and

c)   subsequently processing the signal in the network in dependence upon the said value from the restricted subset of the plurality of possible values.

14.   (*Twice Amended*) A method of operating a communications network comprising:

a)   communicating control signals between nodes of the network via respectively corresponding links, which control signals conform to a predetermined signalling protocol;

b)   at one of the said nodes, receiving at a low level process from a signal source external to the network signals conforming to the said predetermined protocol and including a control field, which control field takes one of a plurality of possible values;

c)   overwriting at a low level process the control field with a value from a restricted subset of the plurality of possible values; and

d)   subsequently processing the signal in the network in dependence upon the said value from the restricted subset of the plurality of possible values.

15.   (*Twice Amended*) A method of operating a node in a communications network, which node is in use connected to a signal source external to the

communications network via respectively corresponding links, the node including a data

link layer interface arranged to respond to service request from network layer functions

of the node and to issue service requests to the communications network the method

comprising:

a)   receiving from the said signal source signals which include a control field,

which control field takes one of a plurality of possible values, and the subsequent

handling of the said signal by the network being controlled according to the value of the

control field;

b)   within the data link layer interface at a low level process overwriting the

control field with a value from a restricted subset of the plurality of possible values; and

c)   subsequently processing the signal in the network in dependence upon the

said value from the restricted subset of the plurality of possible values.

21.   (*Amended*) A method of operating a node in a communications network,

said node being connected via a plurality of links to a corresponding plurality of

neighboring nodes so as to receive messages transmitted from the neighboring nodes,

each message including a plurality of fields, the method comprising:

a low level process comparing one or more of the fields of each of the incoming

messages received on its respective link with prestored permissible values for each

respective field and, in the event that at least one field holds an impermissible value,

taking corrective action;

wherein incoming messages which have been processed by the low level process are forwarded to a higher level process for further processing and wherein the higher level process receives processed messages from a plurality of the low level processes.

23. (*Amended*) A node suitable for connection in a communications network and comprising:

a common high level process or group of processes;

a network interface for connection to the communications network;

an external interface for connection to nodes external to the communications network via respectively corresponding links for receiving messages therefrom; and

a plurality of low level processes operable to process messages received from the external nodes and to feed the processed messages on to the common high level process or group of processes, each low level processor being operable to compare at least one field within each message received with a set of permissible values for that field and to take corrective action in the event that the comparison indicates that the field contains an impermissible value.